

REMARKS

In response to the Office Action dated June 26, 2007, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration based on the above claim amendments and the following remarks. Applicants respectfully submit that the claims as presented are in condition for allowance. Prior to entry of this response, Claims 1-37 were pending in the application, of which Claims 1, 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36 are independent. In the Office Action dated June 26, 2007, Claims 1, 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e), and Claims 2-17, 19-20, 22-28, 30-31, 33-35, and 37 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a). Following this response, Claims 1-37 remain in this application. Applicants hereby address the Examiner's rejections in turn.

I. **Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) and 35 U.S.C. §103(a)**

In the Office Action dated June 26, 2007, the Examiner rejected Claims 1, 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36 under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,504,920 ("*Okon*"). In addition, the Examiner rejected dependent Claims 2-15, 19-20, 22-28, 30-31, 33-35, and 37 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over *Okon*, and dependent Claims 16 and 17 as being unpatentable over *Okon* in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,608,820 ("*Bradshaw, Jr.*"). Claims 1, 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36 have been amended and Applicants respectfully submit that the amendments overcome these rejections and add no new matter.

Amended Claim 1 is patentably distinguishable over the cited art for at least the reason that it recites, for example, "wherein the first local call station is configured to accommodate further bridging of calls received subsequent to the first telephone call

and the second telephone call to the area party line established between the first telephone call and second telephone call." Amended Claims 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36 each includes a similar recitation. Support for these amendments can be found in the specification at least on page 5, line 28-page 6, line 3 and page 8, lines 13-21.

Consistent with the embodiments of the invention, a telephone caller dialing in to an area party line service through a first phone and a first landline may be placed in an area party line where another local telephone caller may dial into the area party line service through a second phone and a second landline. (See specification page 5, lines 28-30.) Both callers may dial a party line number that may be recognized by a service switching point (SSP), and the callers may be bridged together within the area party line. (See specification page 5, line 30-page 6, line 1.) Several other local callers may also dial into the service and join the area party line service as well. (See specification page 6, lines 1-2.) A capacity of the area party line for a given SSP may be dictated by an amount of hardware that is devoted to the given SSP. (See specification page 6, lines 2-3.)

In contrast, *Okon* at least does not disclose an area party line configured to accommodate bridging between a plurality of telephone calls in addition to a first and second telephone call. For example, *Okon* merely discloses matching callers to each other according to expressed interests. (See col. 1, lines 57-58.) According to *Okon*, a new caller is asked to select from a menu of one or more conversation topics. (See col. 1, lines 60-61.) In *Okon*, a prior callers list is then accessed and the new caller is partnered with one of the prior callers having at least one selected topic in common. (See col. 1, lines 61-64.) A telephonic or other communication link is then established

between *Okon's* new caller and the prior caller. (See col. 1, lines 64-65.) A priority system in *Okon* may be used to match the new caller with the prior caller, and may be set to various criteria, such as "first come, first serve". (See col. 4, lines 51-54.) *Okon's* selection process considers whether various parties have been previously partnered and ensures that the same two parties are not connected to each other for at least a minimum time span after their prior connection. (See col. 4, lines 57-60.) Nowhere in *Okon* does it disclose wherein the area party line between the first telephone call and second telephone call is configured to accommodate further bridging of telephone calls received subsequent to the first telephone call and the second telephone call. Rather, *Okon* merely discloses partnering callers limited to a two party connection. Therefore *Okon* cannot disclose further bridging of telephone calls received subsequent to the first telephone call and the second telephone call.

Okon does not anticipate the claimed invention because *Okon* at least does not disclose "wherein the first local call station is configured to accommodate further bridging of calls received subsequent to the first telephone call and the second telephone call to the area party line established between the first telephone call and second telephone call," as recited by amended Claim 1. Amended Claims 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36 each includes a similar recitation. Accordingly, independent Claims 1, 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36 each patentably distinguishes the present invention over the cited art, and Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of this rejection of Claims 1, 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36.

Dependent Claims 2-17, 19-20, 22-28, 30,-31, 33-35, and 37 are also allowable at least for the reasons described above regarding independent Claims 1, 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36, and by virtue of their respective dependencies upon independent Claims 1, 18, 21, 29, 32 and 36. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of these rejections of dependent Claims 2-17, 19-20, 22-28, 30-31, 33-35, and 37.

II. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing remarks, Applicants respectfully request the reconsideration and reexamination of this application and the timely allowance of the pending claims. The preceding arguments are based only on the arguments in the Office Action, and therefore do not address patentable aspects of the invention that were not addressed by the Examiner in the Office Action. The claims may include other elements that are not shown, taught, or suggested by the cited art. Accordingly, the preceding argument in favor of patentability is advanced without prejudice to other bases of patentability. Furthermore, the Office Action contains a number of statements reflecting characterizations of the related art and the claims. Regardless of whether any such statement is identified herein, Applicants decline to automatically subscribe to any statement or characterization in the Office Action.

S/N: 10/603,402

Please grant any extensions of time required to enter this response and charge any additional required fees to our deposit account 13-2725.

Respectfully submitted,
MERCHANT & GOULD P.C.

P.O. Box 2903
Minneapolis, MN 55402-0903
404.954.5066

/D. Kent Stier/

Date: September 26, 2007

D. Kent Stier
Reg. No. 50,640

DKS:YE:mdc

